

Is what you wear in a job interview really that important?

Yes! Your overall appearance is only one factor an interviewer evaluates during a job interview, but it's really important because it's the first visual impression you give. Luckily, your appearance is something you can plan in advance.

Dress the Part

Your goal, when deciding what to wear for a job interview, is to dress the part of the job you want. Some employers' adoption of "business casual" dress policies makes interview-wear decisions more difficult. A rule of thumb: unless you've gotten clear messages that the interviewer expects you to dress casually, you should dress professionally. Even if an employer has instituted a five-day-a-week dress-down policy, you should dress up for the interview. Always err on the side of conservatism. Determine in advance the appropriate style of dress for the industry and company with which you're interviewing; some are more conservative or casual than others. You can do this by asking ahead of time how standard dress is defined by a given employer; friends, acquaintances, or even the recruiter themselves are good resources. Don't be shy about inquiring!

A few words about Individuality

Although your unique style is important, the interview is not always the best time to demonstrate this via your wardrobe. You may not be the suit type or you may adore your multiple facial piercings, but keep in mind that you will have plenty of opportunity to display your individual style once you land the job. At this point, you do not want to give the employer any reason to select someone else over you. Also, keep in mind that you, too, have a choice and that the interview is a great time to find out whether you would be comfortable within an organization. Really use the interview to determine the corporate culture and your potential fit therein. Some guidelines follow:

For Women

In general, the "business uniform" for women that would work in most corporate settings:

- *A two-piece, conservative pant- or skirt-suit is best.*
- *Think conservatively and keep your skirt knee-length; shorter skirts make it hard to sit gracefully and risk being a needless distraction for all parties concerned.*
- *Stick to closed-toe, moderate-heeled (1"-2") shoes.*
- *Avoid excessive make-up and extremely long fingernails; nail polish (if worn) should be a neutral color and be chip-free.*
- *An interview is not the time to show off your belly or the girth of your biceps; stay away from anything very tight or short.*
- *Wear minimal jewelry/piercings; let the sparkle of your personality make you shine!*
- *Bring a professional bag or a nice portfolio-type folder (leather or dark canvas). If you bring a purse, keep it simple, uncluttered, and coordinated with your outfit.*

For Men

In general, the "business uniform" for men that would work in most corporate settings:

- *A two-piece, conservative suit in a dark or charcoal gray color*
- *A white or blue long-sleeve, button-down dress shirt*
- *A coordinating necktie with a subtle pattern*
- *Dark socks - never white*
- *Dark leather shoes, preferably black tie-up style*
- *Minimal jewelry/piercings; let the sparkle of your personality make you shine!*
- *Bring a professional bag/briefcase or a nice portfolio-type folder (leather or canvas)*

Other universal dress-for-success tips:

- **Avoid strong fragrances.** That is, skip the perfumes, colognes, and aftershaves. Interviews can cause stress that may trigger perspiration, which can magnify scents. In a closed interview room, the scent can become overpowering. Of course, wear deodorant or antiperspirant.
- **Think clean.** You want to look pulled-together for your interview. That means clean nails, showered, and good breath. Shined shoes and fresh clothes that are crisply ironed are extremely important.
- **Test-drive your interview wear.** You want to feel comfortable during your interview. It's a good idea to "try out" your interview suit once or twice so you know how you feel in it while you're walking, sitting, and standing. A job interview is not the time for surprises like a gaping blouse, a fitted skirt that lets you take only baby steps, or a too-tight collar.
- **Last-minute checks.** Of course, you'll want to arrive for your interview 10 minutes early and plan to check in 5 minutes early. This will enable you time to step into a nearby restroom for a last-minute check of how you look. You might want to bring a few "emergency" supplies that can come in handy at this moment: a tissue, a small breath mint (especially for smokers or coffee drinkers), a safety pin, and a small comb. Rinsing your hands under warm water and drying them thoroughly right before the interview is a way to avoid the "clammy" handshake.

Remember, while you want to look professional and neat for your interview, dress for comfort and confidence, as well. During the interview, you want to concentrate on selling your skills, abilities, and interest in doing the job, not on your clothes! Good luck at the interview!

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